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CENSUS TESTS

Prepared by the ECLA secretariat

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Census tests 1/

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Census tests refer to all type of tests connected with a census, whether a questionnaire test only, a field trial or an experimental census.

2. The volume of work that is required for the organization and execution of a census, and its high cost, make it advisable to use census tests. A population and housing census should be continously modified, in the light of social and technological change, to satisfy the need for new information that such change demands.

3. Even when there is no intention of making many changes in the national census, census tests will serve to check personnel training. In the countries which intend to make changes, whether in the organization, in some stages of the census, or in the questions, these tests will be used to combine the training of personnel with the trial of new methods and questions, because if these are wrongly made, they can make irreparable damages to the general census data and results.

1/ Based on United Nations, Population and Housing Census Methods, Vol. I, General Aspects of Population Censuses, U.N. publication, Sales number 58. XVII.6 (Vol.I)

/ II. PURPOSES

II. PURPOSES OF THE CENSUS TEST

4. A census test can have different purposes, on which will depend the type of test to be made. A distinction can be made between general and special types of census tests.

a) General census tests

5. General census tests are intended to try out the three main stages of the census. These are: the preparatory work before the enumeration, the enumeration itself and the post-enumeration work. (See document ST/ECLA/Conf.32/L.1).

6. This type of test makes it possible to make full use of past experience, and to try out the different stages of the census in the same conditions as the national census.

b) Special census tests

7. Special census tests are intended for one or more stages of the census operation, as well as to try out new methods. The most important are those which refer to the questionnaire, to enumeration and to data processing.

i) Test of the questionnaire

8. A census questionnaire must be tested, because this is the best way of checking the adequacy of its design and content. It is probable that the questionnaires used in a former census do not satisfy the present needs and that new questions have to be added.

9. In the pilot censuses one or more basic questionnaires can be tested. When two or more census tests are held in order to try out questionnaires, changes can be introduced in the subsequent tests. On the other hand if only one pilot census is held mainly for testing questionnaires, two or more different questionnaires can be used in order to compare their relative advantages. For instance, a pilot census could be held which uses for part of the enumeration a questionnaire for each household and for another part an individual questionnaire.

10. It is not necessary to submit the whole questionnaire to a test; this can be limited to those questions with respect to which some doubts exist.

/ Generally/speaking,

Generally speaking, special attention should be given to questions dealing with at least one of the three general census topics, i.e. demographic aspects, economic aspects and educational aspects of the population. Sometimes only some new questions are asked referring to these topics.

11. The way in which the questions are put and the definitions are most important, as the pilot census results may show whether it is convenient or not, both technically and from the viewpoint of costs to include certain questions.

ii) Enumeration test

12. A pilot census may help to indicate the best enumeration method to be used in a certain country. For instance, it could help in choosing between self-enumeration or interview, or a combination of these two methods. Also, the training and efficiency of enumerators can be tested, as well the time needed for the enumeration. Information can be obtained on the need for controls in the field and on the probable number of staff required for the enumeration.

iii) Test of data processing

13. This test is done to verify the usefulness of the questionnaire for coding, editing and tabulating the data. The pre-codification and tabulation systems to be used can be tested. The census test can be specially useful to try out a tabulation system based on an electronic computer, when such a system has not been used before.

14. This type of test can also show whether the punch cards, the instructions for their correction, the codes and the tabulation programme have been adequately designed.

15. Though a data-processing test can be made with fictitious or old data, in most cases, it is preferable to combine it with an enumeration test and perhaps also with a questionnaire test.

iv) Other uses of special tests

16. Besides those specified above, these tests have other uses, namely:

/-checking of

- checking of other phases of the census organization, including selection of alternative possibilities;
- test of collection of data of local importance with a supplementary questionnaire;
- test of instructions;
- verification of efficiency of census staff, a most important basis for estimating the required number of personnel and the appropriateness of selection and training method;
- decision on the possibility of combining a population and housing census with an agricultural census or with some other economic inquiry;
- tests on the use of sampling methods;
- decision on the best period of the year and day of the week for the enumeration and whether it is better to concentrate the census on one day or spread it out over several days.

III. RELATION BETWEEN THE DATE OF THE PILOT CENSUS AND THE MAIN CENSUS

17. The pilot census should be held sufficiently in advance so as to take advantage of the experience and results obtained in the main census and to introduce the necessary refinements and changes in the procedures. However, it should not be held too long before the census, when the bases for designing the pilot census are not yet available.

18. From this it follows that the pilot census should be held at such a time as to make it possible to analyse the experience obtained and to change the original plans, the questions, the definitions and instructions for filling out the questionnaires.

19. In Annex I to document ST/ECLA/Conf.32/L.1 it is suggested to have a census test held twelve months before the census. This suggestion applies to countries which plan to organize one pilot census. Countries which plan to held several pilot censuses, should try to held the last one about this period.

/ IV. THE

IV. THE NUMBER OF PILOT CENSUSES

20. There are many advantages in carrying out more than one pilot census some time before the national census: each one can give rise to changes in the different aspects of the census, which can be introduced in later tests.

21. The test may also show which is the best time of the year for carrying out the general census (if for instance one test was done in winter and another in summer), or the best day of reference, for instance one census test can be taken on a Sunday or holiday and another on a weekday. Such tests show movements during the different parts of the year and indicate on which days people are more likely to be found at home.

22. Should lack of time or resources make it necessary to limit the pilot census to a single test, it should be of the general type, including the various aspects of the census.

V. PLACE OF PILOT CENSUSES

23. The characteristics of the area in which a pilot census takes place are important, since whatever its size, it should be representative of conditions for the final census.

24. If the test is conducted not only to try out methods, but also to obtain data, a population sample could be used (see document ST/ECLA/Conf. 32/L.12). A test of the general type has to be organized in a complete administrative unit, which could be a locality or a township, or a country, or a district. If different types of localities exist, localities representative of all existing types have to be selected.

25. If a big city or the capital is selected, a district should be chosen where the complete census work could be organized. If a test of the special type is conducted, small zones in different points of the country could be selected.

/ VI. EXPERIENCES

VI. EXPERIENCES WITH CENSUS TESTS IN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

26. The following table gives some information on pilot censuses, which the countries of the region have carried out or are planning to carry out during the period of preparation for the 1970 census. The table shows the objective of these pilot censuses, based on data for 13 countries, received at the ECLA secretariat up to 1 May.

27. Of these countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Barbados and Guyana are not planning at this moment to conduct a pilot census. Four of the other countries have executed pilot censuses, two of them general and another two special; two of these plan to conduct another census test. Other four countries plan to organize a pilot census, three general and one special.

28. Reference papers have been submitted by the statistical services and by the CELADE on the pilot censuses of Chile, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (see documents ST/ECLA/Conf.32/L.14, ST/ECLA/Conf.32/L.15 and ST/ECLA/Conf.32/L.16 prepared for this Seminar).

/ ANNEX I

Country	Pilot or experimental censuses					
	Carried out			Planned		
	Date	Place	Type and purposes	Date	Place	Type and purposes
Argentina	-	-	-	...	One urban and one rural area	General: trial of census material and of organization of census execution
Bolivia	1966	...	Special: questionnaire	-	-	-
Chile	April 1967	Commune of Valdivia	General: trial of all consus stages	1968	Santiago or neighborhoods	Special: questionnaire
Costa Rica	March	Canton of Grecia	Special: trial of new questions	-	-	-
Cuba	November 1967	Municipality of San Antonio de los Baños	General: Administrative and operational test and performance of questionnaires and subsidiary forms and of data processing	September 1968	Municipality of San Antonio de los Baños	General: The same as carried out
Mexico	-	-	-	1968	...	General: Organization, instruction, questions, respondents, attitude and post-enumeration work
Panama	-	-	-	1968	Different places in the country	Special: questionnaires and procedures
Dominican Republic	-	-	-	July 1968	Sabane Grande of Palanque	General: organization, questionnaire, instructions and data processing